

2D. PATTERNS OF PREMATURE MORTALITY

The average age of Arizonans who died in 1999 was 71.7 years, with males below the mean at 68.8 years and females above the mean at 74.9 years (**Table 2D-1**). This average age at death increased from 68.2 years in 1988.

■ Ethnic differences

Neither the average age at death nor its increase over time was demonstrated in the four racial/ethnic minority groups. White non-Hispanics, the majority ethnic group, had an average age at death close to or exceeding the overall average.

White non-Hispanic males during 1999 died at an average age that exceeded the average age of death of Asian males by 9.2 years, Black males by 13.7 years, Hispanic males by 15.3 years and American Indian males by 19.7 years (**Table 2D-1**).

The gap between the average age at death of white non-Hispanic females and females of other ethnic groups also was substantial. Compared to white non-Hispanic females, on average, Asian females were 11.5 years, Black females 13.1 years, Hispanic females 13.7 years and American Indian females 16.4 years younger when they died.

The inequity between white non-Hispanics and the ethnic minorities in terms of expectation of a long life is narrowing. In 1989, compared to white non-Hispanics, on average, Hispanics

died 13.3 years younger, Blacks died 13.5 years younger and American Indians died 17.4 years younger. In 1999, the respective differences in average age at death between non-Hispanic whites and each ethnic minority were 12.5 years, 11.2 years and 16 years.

■ Proportion of premature deaths

As expected, based on the findings for average age at death, non-Hispanic whites were the only group with less than 50 percent of all deaths (47.4 percent) occurring before the expected years of life were reached (**Table 2D-2**). The 1998 premature death ratio was 39.3 percent for non-Hispanic white females and 54.8 percent for non-Hispanic white males. In contrast, at least 63 percent of deaths among ethnic minority males occurred prematurely.

■ Premature mortality by cause

All deaths from HIV infection were premature (**Table 2D-4**) and an average age at death from *HIV infection* was 41.6 years (**Table 2D-3**). The average age at death was lower for *homicide*, which had an average age of 37.2 years and a premature death ratio of 98 percent. The other causes of death for which a majority of deaths were premature are in rank order from highest to lowest percent: *drowning* (97.7 percent), *alcoholism* (95.0 percent), *motor vehicle crashes* (92.0 percent), *cervical cancer* (90.2 percent), *suicide* (87.3 percent), *breast cancer* (69.1 percent), *lung cancer* (67.8 percent) and *diabetes* (60.2 percent). *Alzheimer's disease* had both the highest average age at death (84.8 years) and the lowest premature mortality ratio (13.0 percent).